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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the provision of early childhood education and day care (educare) structure, provision, and funding. The essay's analysis of these factors indicates that current educare provisions are poorly structured, racially discriminatory, underfunded, and generally inadequate for most children and their families, especially in black communities. Specific recommendations are made to improve and revamp the current system, noting that national, regional, and local governmental bodies need to place more emphasis on providing effective educare to all South African families that need it, and private sources of funding and support must be utilized in tandem with increased government expenditures. (MDM)

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCARE: A PROVISION SYSTEM MUST SHOW THAT WE DO CARE

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Introduction

Recognition of the importance of the early years coupled with changes in the patterns of employment of women, has resulted in the development of early childhood educare facilities throughout the world. Although this is widely recognised, educare provision in South Africa is characterised by an inadequate system in terms of both quantity and quality which does not meet the needs of the nation's children.

A recent National Education Co-ordinating Committee statement on early childhood educare declared that

'Endemic violence, the ravages of poverty, the absence of the basic necessities of life such as food, water, good health and sanitation, decent housing, and the manifest neglect of opportunities for the early education of our young children have become predominantly the features of the lives of the seven million children of preschooling age in South Africa'.

Only token mention of early childhood education and care is made in existing education, child care and welfare legislation. Early childhood educare services are permitted within the framework of separate development. For example, education and welfare are legislated for by the separate legislative authorities of the House of Assembly (white), House of Representatives (coloured) and House of Delegates (Indian). Legislation on education and welfare for blacks outside the independent and self-governing states is dealt with by Parliament as general affairs legislation via the Departments of Development Planning (black welfare) and Education and Training (black education).

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The result is that no single early childhood education act aimed at providing educare for the nation's youngest children exists.

Educare Policy

The Government in its response to the De Lange Commission recommendations stated that it was not realistic in terms of cost and manpower to provide comprehensive provision of early childhood educare facilities and services at State expense. It felt that there should be development of such services by various Departments, but these should be limited to areas where the needs of small children are greatest. The initiative for educare provision should come from private organisations.

Educare Structure

Where educare is provided, responsibility lies with numerous authorities who have an interest in terms of either the function of the authority (education or health services and welfare) or of the statutory population category concerned. Including authorities in the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei and the self-governing territories, over twenty departments are structurally involved in Educare.

Educare Provision

Statistics indicate that in 1985 only a small minority of preschool age children in South Africa had access to a preschool facility. What is striking is the great variation in provision for the different statutory population category. Figures produced show that of a total of 157 626 children in provision, 108 600 (69%) were white, 15 845

(10%) were coloured, 2 418 (1.5%) were Indian and 30 763 (19.5%) were black. (Van den Berg and Vergnani, 1986:55). This illustrates the desperate shortage of provision services and facilities.

Funding

Available state funding is in inverse proportion to the need. Some of the funding problems are:

- the lack of a standardised system of funding
- the inadequate degree of funding and disparity in funding for the different statutory population categories
- the unrealistic means tests for subsidisation
- the unreasonable standards and regulations to qualify for registration and subsidisation.

Analysis of Educare policy, structure and provision

Early Childhood Educare policy in South Africa impacts on the status and rights of women and the right of the preschool child to educare.

In South Africa women compose a substantial portion of the economically active population. Because of compelling economic reasons the proportion of mothers in employment has increased from 17.8% in 1939 to 32.4% in 1980 and was estimated at 34.8% in 1987. (Lemmer, 1987:2). Herman, (1986:12) records the number of women in the labour market in 1985 as 1.4 million. Given that agricultural and domestic workers and workers in the TBVC states are excluded the real figure is probably closer to 3 million. According to Terblanche (1987:3) the South African economy cannot function without women.

Government must accept that many women with young children are working and that consequently their children need to be looked after by other people during the day. Government policy has however been hesitant and unclear. The belief that the mother herself should care for and educate the young child at all costs is still prevalent amongst policy makers.

The right of the child to educate is closely linked to the status and rights of women. At issue is whether the preschool child has the right to public preschool educate and whether the State has an obligation to assure that right and to provide accordingly. Despite the considerable evidence pointing to the importance of the preschool years in a child's education, this is not recognised by the State.

An underlying factor in this issue is the gender and age linked inequalities found in relation to women and children in our society, which determines the status and resources allocated to these two groups. Gil links this to

'...the biological difference between the sexes, which was utilised during early stages of societal evolution as an important criterion for the division of labour. As these early, nature linked arrangements were elaborated socially into stable cultural patterns and taboos, male dominance and its corollary, subjugation and exploitation of females, became institutionalised in human societies'. (Gil, 1981:65)

This resulted in a generally accepted allocation of inferior status and rights to women.

Gil sees the limitations of children's rights also deriving from biological conditions. The rights and status of children are closely linked to those of their mothers. Because children are intimately linked to and dependent upon their mothers in the early childhood years many societies saw children as the 'property as well as the responsibility of their parents'. (Gil, 1981:65)

There are also ideological orientations underlying educare policy. Educare provision is based on the 'separate but equal' principle applied to the separate development of the different statutory population categories. The 'separate but equal' principle was, however, rejected in the mid-1950's in the United States of America. The US Supreme Court found that

'Segregation of white and coloured children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the coloured children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law; for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the Black group...We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal'. (Brown vs the Board of Education 347, US 483 (1954))

Cock et al (1984) feel that the neglect of child care in South Africa must be located in terms of the State's lack of concern with the conditions under which African labour power is reproduced generally. The neglect of State expenditure on child care is thus linked to a whole series of state policies such as the neglect of housing, education, health, pensions and welfare services generally for the African working class.

The lack of educare provision is cause for concern. Eckstein comments that

'Black preschoolers are virtually non-existent in South Africa because parents cannot afford the apparant luxury when they hardly enough money for food'. (Eckstein, 1987:8)

Short describes the situation as follows:

'In South Africa there is a severe lack of preschool facilities available for young children in the communities where poverty is most serious. Relatively few of these facilities are able to provide the kind of educational programme which disadvantaged children really need: centres

are overcrowded; there are very few trained teachers; the adult-child ratio's are poor, and many are poorly equipped...Where babies are accommodated there tends to be little or no awareness of their developmental needs with the result that custodial care only is provided. Therefore infants who are already at risk, spend most of their waking hours in unstimulating environments.' (Short, 1984:7)

This analysis presents a picture of educare in South Africa which

- has no clearly discernible unitary educare policy
- ignores the needs of working mothers and their children
- does not guarantee the young child the right to educare
- is based on racist ideology in which access to provision is biased in favour of certain children, and which separates children on the basis of skin colour
- has a structure which is fragmented, both functionally and racially
- is inadequate and takes no notice of demographic trends
- is not co-ordinated at any level
- is discriminatory in terms of provision and resource allocation
- is poorly funded by the State
- allows standards and regulations to inhibit provision
- has inadequate training facilities.

Towards effective and efficient educare provision

We are challenged to develop policy, organisational and programme guidelines for a non-racial, democratic and unitary educare system. Such a policy must not however be determined in isolation from health, welfare, labour, housing, family benefit, taxation and other policies. Several principles should underline an educare policy. These include:

- The child has a basic right to services which would enable him to develop socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually to the full.

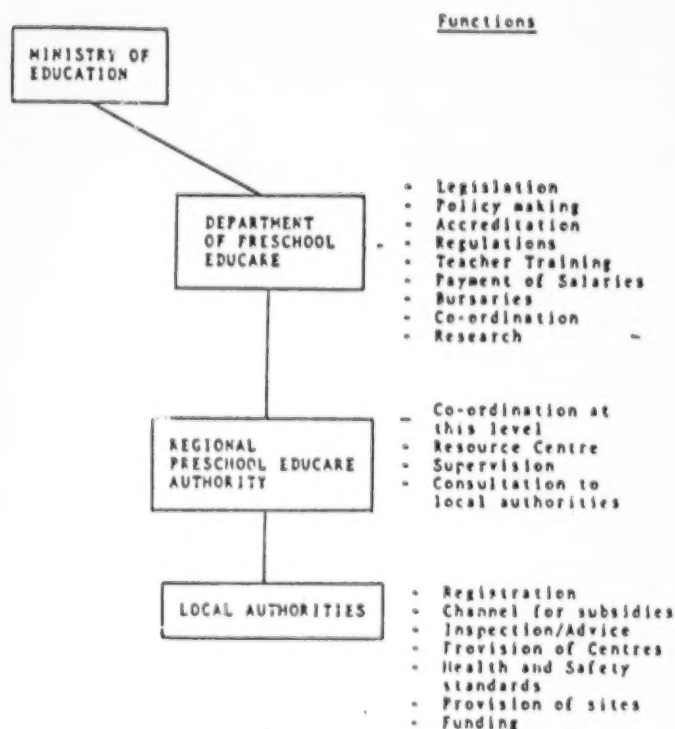
- The family retains final responsibility for the child's early education and care, but should obtain support from the State to fulfil its obligations to the child.
- Every child should have the same right to educate which caters for his needs and this right must be applied without discrimination.
- Enrolment in an educate programme should be voluntary dependent on the need for the service. Families in need must have priority of access to services and facilities.
- The management of educate should devolve to the lowest appropriate level of authority.
- The community must decide on what services are needed and be involved in the organisation and management thereof. This means communities are empowered to take control of educate projects.
- In both planning and service delivery maximum use must be made of the resources of each community in the interest of its children.
- The lack of financial means should not be a barrier to children who need educate.
- A wide range of alternative forms of provision must be provided to meet varying needs.

Educare Structure

Serious problems confronting educate in South Africa such as demographic imbalance, financial input, lack of provision and teacher qualifications call for a major restructuring of the educate system. The professional fragmentation between education and care must be removed and one department integrating education and care must be brought into existence. The structure should operate on the basis of a distribution of power between central and local authorities, that is a national system locally administered with the central authority a partner rather than controller. Overall authority for policy should rest at central level but direct administration and day-to-day management of projects should rest at local level. This ensures responsiveness to local needs and conditions. This proposal involves a three-level

DIAGRAM 1

RECOMMENDED PRESCHOOL EDUCARE STRUCTURE



educare structure (see Diagram 1) with in-built systems for participation and negotiation at each level. At the first level is a single non-racial central authority; at the second level regional educare authorities with specific tasks as regards the region; and at the third level the local authority which is concerned with the provision of educare. The argument for local government of educare is best described as follows:

'The importance of local government lies in the fact that it is the means by which people can provide services for themselves; can take an active and constructive part in the business of government; and can decide for themselves, within the limits of what national policies and local resources allow, what kind of services they want and what kind of environment they prefer.' (Open University, 1974:72).

Funding

The justification for State expenditure on educate is that educate is beneficial to the child by giving him a head start in life and to society by preparing the way for a more productive adult life. If the State wants educate for its children it must be prepared to find the resources. The implementation of this policy will place early childhood educate in competition with other government departments for public funding.

One means of funding educate from within the Education budget is by recovering the cost of higher education and reallocating government spending on education toward the level with the highest social return. The high degree of public subsidisation of tertiary education boosts the demand for higher education which Psachoropoulos (1986) calls the relatively less socially efficient educational investment. The State could recover costs of tertiary education by increasing fees for higher education. This would necessitate an increase in student loans made available by the State which could be recovered from recipients after completion of studies. Loans taken out would be to finance current studies against future income. Furthermore, if the rationalisation and restructuring applied to educate was also done to primary and secondary education substantial savings would be made. These resources saved could be channeled to early childhood educate.

The Private Sector

The role of the private sector in support of educate facilities must be expanded. There exists a need to educate employers concerning facilities for their staff and the communities from which they draw their labour.

The Role of Voluntary Organisations

Voluntary organisations are valuable assets which the State cannot afford to lose. These should work with parents and communities in providing services. In cases where voluntary organisations take the initiative in setting up services this should be done with community support and effort and the communities should control the projects.

Community Control

It is important that local communities and in particular parents of children control preschool projects. When the people most directly involved in educare, that is, parents, make decisions about the educare of their children; when staff are accountable to parents and when the centre is part of the community; preschool educare is most likely to flourish. Community control means full control of the management of centres, selection of staff, conduct of financial affairs and determination of curriculum and programme.

Conclusion

There is no instant solution to the educare problems in South Africa and a solution is not to be found merely in formulating a new educare policy, altering the existing structures or providing more centres, services and facilities. The solution is intimately linked to broader social, political and economic issues facing the country. These issues have a major impact on educare. I believe however, that these recommendations will contribute towards a more efficient and effective provision system.

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